GOD
252
Sta/Ser
111086

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
TOWN HALL, BOMBAY-1.

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 19 September, 2016

SERMON

PREACHED BY

ARTHUR PENRHYN STANLEY, D.D.

DEAN OF WESTMINSTER

In Westminster Abbey

JUNE 19, 1870

111086

(*THE FIRST SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY*)

BEING THE SUNDAY FOLLOWING

THE FUNERAL OF CHARLES DICKENS

B.e.86

London
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1870

God
252
Sta/Ser
111086

This Sermon—preached under the pressure of a temporary indisposition, which prevented it from being heard except by comparatively few—is printed at the request of some of those who have since desired to read it.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

ST. LUKE XV. 3; XVI. 19—21.

He spake this Parable . . . . .

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:

And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,

And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

THERE ARE SOME PASSAGES of Scripture which, when they are read in the services of the Sunday, almost demand a special notice from their extraordinary force and impressiveness. Such is the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, read as the Gospel of this day. There are some incidents of human life which almost demand a special notice from the depth and breadth of the feelings which they awaken in the heart of the congregation. Such was the ceremony which, on Tuesday last, conveyed to his grave, within these walls, a lamented and gifted being, who had for years delighted and instructed the generation to which he belonged. And if the Scripture of the day and the incident of the week direct our minds to the same thoughts, and mutually illustrate each other, the attraction is irresistible, and the moral which each supplies is doubly enforced.

Let me then draw out these lessons in what I now propose to say.

1. I will speak first of the *form* of instruction which we are called upon to notice in the Gospel of this Sunday. It is not only like most of our Lord's instructions, a Parable, but it is, as it were, a Parable of the Parables. It is the last of a group which occurs in the 15th and 16th chapters of St. Luke, where the story is taken in each case, not as in the other Gospels, from inanimate or irrational creatures, but from the doings and characters of men. First comes the story of the Good Shepherd, with all its depth of tenderness; then the story of the Indefatigable Searcher, with all its depth of earnestness; then the story of the Prodigal Son, with all its depth of pathos; then the story of the Unjust Steward, with all its depth of satire; and, last of all, comes the story of the Rich Man and the Poor Man, drawn not merely from the mountain side, or the dark chamber, or the tranquil home, or the accountant's closet, but from the varied stir of human enjoyment and human suffering in the streets and alleys of Jerusalem. It is a tale of real life—so real that we can hardly believe that it is not history. Yet it is, nevertheless, a tale of pure fiction from first to last. Dives and Lazarus are as much imaginary beings as Hamlet or as Shylock; the scene of Abraham's bosom and of the rich man in Hades is drawn not from any literal outward truth, or ancient sacred record, but from the popular Jewish conceptions current at the time. This Parable is, in short, the most direct example which the Bible contains of the use, of the value of the sacredness of fictitious narrative. There are doubtless many other instances in the Sacred Records.

There is the exquisite parable of the Talking Trees in the Book of Judges; there is the sublime drama of the Patriarch and his Friends in the Book of Job; there is the touching and graceful picture of Jewish family life in the Book of Tobit, from which our Church selects some of its most striking precepts, and which, in its Homilies, is treated as if inspired directly by the Holy Ghost. All these are instances where moral lessons are conveyed by the invention of characters which either never existed at all, or, if they existed, are made to converse in forms of speech entirely drawn from the inspired imagination of the sacred writer. But the highest sanction to this mode of instruction is that given us in this Parable by our Lord Himself. This, we are told, was His ordinary mode of teaching; He stamped it with His peculiar mark. "Without a parable,"[1] without a fable, without an invented story of this kind, He rarely opened His lips. He, the Example of examples, the Teacher of teachers, "taught "His disciples[2] many things by parables." Through this parabolic form some of His gravest instructions have received a double life. If we were to ask for the most perfect exposition of the most perfect truth respecting God and man, which the world contains, it will be found not in a Discourse, or a Creed, or a Hymn, or even a Prayer, but in a Parable—a story—one of those which I have already cited—the Parable of the Prodigal Son.

I have dwelt on this characteristic of the Gospel teaching because it is well that we should see how the Bible

[1] Matt. xiii. 34. [2] Mark iv. 2.

itself sanctions a mode of instruction which has been, in a special sense, God's gift to our own age. Doubtless His "grace is manifold,[1]"—in the original expression, many coloured. In various ages it has assumed various forms —the divine flame of poetry, the far-reaching gaze of science, the searching analysis of philosophy, the glorious page of history, the burning eloquence of speaker or preacher, the grave address of moralist or divine. These all we have had in ages past; their memorials are around us here. These all we have in their measure, some more, some less, in the age in which we live. But it is perhaps not too much to say, that in no age of the world, and in no country of the world, has been developed on so large a scale, and with such striking effects as in our own, the gift of "speaking in parables;" the gift of addressing mankind through romance and novel and tale and fable. First and far above all others came that greatest of all the masters of fiction—the glory of Scotland—whose romances refreshed and exalted our childhood as they still refresh and exalt our advancing years —as, would to God that they still might continue to refresh and exalt the childhood and the manhood of the coming generation. He rests not here. He rests beside his native Tweed. But long may his magic spell charm and purify the ages which yet shall be! Long may yonder monument of the Scottish Duke, whom he has immortalised in one of his noblest works, keep him for ever in our memory, as, one by one, the lesser and later lights which have followed in that track where he led the way, are gathered beneath its overshadowing marble.

[1] 1 Pet. iv. 10.

It is because one of those bright lights has now passed from amongst us—one in whom this generation seemed to see the most vivid exemplification of this heaven-sent power of fiction, that I would thus speak of it, for a few moments, in its most general aspect.

There was a truth—let us freely confess it—in the old Puritan feeling against an exaggerated enjoyment of romances, as tending to relax the fibre of the moral character. That was a wholesome restraint which I remember in my childhood—which kept us from revelling in tales of fancy till the day's work was over, and thus impressed upon us that the reading of pleasant fictions was the holiday of life, and not its serious business. It is this very thing which, as it constitutes the danger of fictitious narratives, constitutes also their power. They approach us at times when we are indisposed to attend to anything else. They fill up those odd moments of life which exercise, for good or evil, so wide an effect over the whole tenor of our course. Poetry may enkindle a loftier fire—the Drama may rivet the attention more firmly—Science may open a wider horizon—Philosophy may touch a deeper spring—but no works are so penetrating, so pervasive, none reach so many homes, and attract so many readers, as the romance of modern times. Those who read nothing else read eagerly the exciting tale. Those whom sermons never reach, whom history fails to arrest, are reached and arrested by the fictitious characters, the stirring plot, of the successful novelist. It is this which makes a wicked novel more detestable than almost any other form of wicked words or deeds. It is this which gives even to

a foolish or worthless novel a demoralising force beyond its own contemptible demerits. It is this which makes a good novel — pure in style, elevating in thought, true in sentiment — one of the best of boons to the Christian home and to the Christian state.

O vast responsibility to those who wield this mighty engine—mighty it may be, and has been, for corruption, for debasement, for defilement; mighty also it may be, mighty it certainly has been, in our English novels (to the glory of our country be it spoken), mighty for edification and for purification, for giving wholesome thoughts, high aspirations, soul-stirring recollections. Use these wonderful works of genius as not abusing them; enjoy them as God's special gifts to us—only remember that the true Romance of Life is Life itself.

2. But this leads me to the further question of the special form which this power assumed in him whose loss the country now deplores with a grief so deep and genuine as to be itself a matter for serious reflection. What was there in him which called forth this widespread sympathy? What is there in this sympathy and in that which created it, worthy of our religious thoughts on this day?

I profess not here to sit in judgment on the whole character and career of this gifted writer. That must be left for posterity to fix in its proper niche amongst the worthies of English literature.

Neither is this the place to speak at length of those lighter and more genial qualities, such as made his death, like that of one who rests beside him, almost

"an eclipse of the gaiety of nations." Let others tell elsewhere of the brilliant and delicate satire, the kindly wit, the keen and ubiquitous sense of the ludicrous and grotesque. "There is a time to laugh, "and there is a time to weep." Laughter is itself a good, yet there are moments when we care not to indulge in it. It may even seem hereafter, as it has sometimes seemed to some of our age, that the nerves of the rising generation were, for the time at least, unduly relaxed by that inexhaustible outburst of a humorous temper, of a never-slumbering observation, in the long unceasing flood of drollery and merriment which, it may be, brought out the comic and trivial side of human life in too strong and startling a relief.

But even thus, and even in this sacred place, it is good to remember that, in the writings of him who is gone, we have had the most convincing proof that it is possible to have moved old and young to inextinguishable laughter without the use of a single expression which could defile the purest, or shock the most sensitive. Remember this, if there be any who think that you cannot be witty without being wicked—who think that in order to amuse the world and awaken the interest of hearers or readers, you must descend to filthy jests, and unclean suggestions, and debasing scenes. So may have thought some gifted novelists of former times; but so thought not, so wrote not (to speak only of the departed) Walter Scott, or Jane Austen, or Elizabeth Gaskell, or William Thackeray: so thought not, and so wrote not, the genial and loving humourist whom we now mourn. However deep into the dregs of society

his varied imagination led him in his writings to descend, it still breathed an untainted atmosphere. He was able to show us, by his own example, that even in dealing with the darkest scenes and the most degraded characters, genius could be clean, and mirth could be innocent.

3. There is another point, yet more peculiar and special, on which we may safely dwell, even in the very house of God, even beside the freshly laid grave. In that long series of stirring tales, now for ever closed, there was a profoundly serious—nay, may we not say, a profoundly Christian and Evangelical truth,—of which we all need to be reminded, and of which he was, in his own way, the special teacher.

It is the very same lesson which is represented to us in the Parable of this day. "There was a certain rich "man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and "fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain "beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of "sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell "from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came "and licked his sores." It is a picture whose every image is expressive, and whose every image awakens thoughts that live for ever. It is true that an Oriental atmosphere hangs around it—the Syrian purple, the fine linen of Egypt, the open banqueting hall, the beggar in the gateway, the dogs prowling about the city. But the spirit of the Parable belongs to the West as well as to the East. The contrast, the inequality of deserts, on which it insists, meets us in the streets of London, no less than in the streets of Jerusalem; and the moral

which the Parable intends that we should draw from that contrast is the very same which in his own peculiar way is urged upon us, with irresistible force, throughout the writings of our lost preceptor. Close beside the magnificence, the opulence, the luxury of this great metropolis, is that very neighbour —those very neighbours—whom the Parable describes. The Rich Man has no name in the Scripture; but the Poor Man has a name in the Book of God, and he has a name given him, he has many names given him, in the tales in which the departed has described the homes and manners of our poorer brethren. "Lazarus" —the "help of God"—the noble name which tells us that God helps those who help themselves—is the very prototype of those outcasts, of those forlorn, struggling, human beings, whose characters are painted by him in such vivid colours that we shrink from speaking of them here, even as we should from speaking of persons yet alive—whose names are such familiar household words that, to mention them in a sacred place, seems almost like a desecration. It is of this vast outlying mass of unseen human suffering that we need constantly to be reminded. It is this contrast between things as they are in the sight of God, and things as they seem in the sight of man, that so easily escapes us all in our busy civilisation. It is the difficulty of seeing this, of realising this, which made a Parable like that of the Rich Man and Lazarus so vital a necessity for the world when it was first spoken. But He who spake as never man spake saw, with His far-seeing glance, into our complicated age as well as into His own. What was needed

111086

then is still more needed now; and it is to meet this need that our dull and sluggish hearts want all the assistance which can be given by lively imagination, by keen sympathy, by the dramatic power of making things which are not seen be as even though they were seen. Such were the gifts wielded with preeminent power by him who has passed away.

It was the distinguishing glory of a famous Spanish saint, that she was "the advocate of the absent." That is precisely the advocacy of the Divine Parable in the Gospels — the advocacy of these modern human Parables, which in their humble measure represent its spirit — the advocacy of the absent poor, of the neglected, of the weaker side, whom not seeing we are tempted to forget. It was a fine trait of a noble character of our own times, that, though full of interests, intellectual, domestic, social, the distress of the poor of England, he used to say, "pierced through "his happiness, and haunted him day and night." It is because this susceptibility is so rare, so difficult to attain, that we ought doubly to value those who have the eye to see, and the ear to hear, and the tongue to speak, and the pen to describe, those who are not at hand to demand their own rights, to set forth their own wrongs, to pourtray their own sufferings. Such was he who lies yonder. By him that veil was rent asunder which parts the various classes of society. Through his genius the rich man, faring sumptuously every day, was made to see and feel the presence of the Lazarus at his gate. The unhappy inmates of the workhouse, the neglected children in the dens and caves of our great

cities, the starved and ill-used boys in remote schools, far from the observation of men, felt that a new ray of sunshine was poured on their dark existence—a new interest awakened in their forlorn and desolate lot. It was because an unknown friend had pleaded their cause with a voice which rang through the palaces of the great, as well as through the cottages of the poor. It was because, as by a magician's wand, those gaunt figures and strange faces had been, it may be sometimes, in exaggerated forms, made to stand and speak before those who hardly dreamed of their existence.

Nor was it mere compassion that was thus evoked. As the same Parable which delineates the miseries of the outcast Lazarus tells us also how, under that external degradation, was nursed a spirit fit for converse with the noble-minded and the gentle-hearted in the bosom of the Father of the Faithful,—so the same master hand which drew the sorrows of the English poor, drew also the picture of the unselfish kindness, the courageous patience, the tender thoughtfulness, that lie concealed behind many a coarse exterior, in many a rough heart, in many a degraded home. When the little workhouse boy wins his way, pure and undefiled, through the mass of wickedness in the midst of which he passes—when the little orphan girl brings thoughts of heaven into the hearts of all around her, and is as the very gift of God to the old man whose desolate life she cheers—when the little cripple not only blesses his father's needy home, but softens the rude stranger's hardened conscience—there is a lesson taught which touches every heart, which no human being can feel without

being the better for it, which makes that grave seem to those who crowd around it as though it were the very grave of those little innocents whom he had thus created for our companionship, for our instruction, for our delight and solace. He laboured to tell us all, in new, very new, words, the old, old story that there is even in the worst of capacity for goodness—a soul worth redeeming, worth reclaiming, worth regenerating. He laboured to tell the rich, the educated, how this better side was to be found and respected even in the most neglected Lazarus. He laboured to tell the poor no less, to respect this better part in themselves, to remember that they also have a call to be good and just, if they will but hear it. If by any such means he has brought rich and poor nearer together, and made Englishmen feel more nearly as one family, he will not assuredly have lived in vain, nor will his bones in vain have been laid in this home and hearth of the English nation.

4. There is one more thought that this occasion suggests. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, besides the pungent, pathetic lessons of social life which it impresses upon us, is also conveyed, beyond any other part of the Gospels, the awful solemnity of the other world. 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, "neither will they be persuaded though one rose from "the dead." So also on this day there is impressed upon us a solemnity, before which the most lively sallies of wit, the most brilliant splendours of genius wax faint and pale, namely, the solemnity of each man's individual responsibility, in each man's life and death.

When on Tuesday last we stood by that open grave, in the still deep silence of the summer morning, in the midst of the vast, solitary space, broken only by that small band of fourteen mourners, it was impossible not to feel that there was something more sacred, more arresting than any earthly fane however bright, or than any historic mausoleum however august—and that was the return of the individual human soul into the hands of its Maker.

As I sit not here in judgment on the exact place to be allotted in the roll of history to that departing glory, neither do I sit in judgment on that departing spirit. But there are some farewell thoughts which I would fain express.

Many, many are the feet which have trodden and will tread the consecrated ground around that narrow grave; many, many are the hearts which both in the Old and in the New World are drawn towards it, as towards the resting-place of a dear personal friend; many are the flowers that have been strewed, many the tears shed, by the grateful affection of "the "poor that cried, and the fatherless, and those that "had none to help them." May I speak to these a few sacred words which perhaps will come with a new meaning and a deeper force, because they come from the lips of a lost friend—because they are the most solemn utterance of lips now for ever closed in the grave. They are extracted from "the will "of Charles Dickens, dated May 12, 1869," and they will be heard by most here present for the first time. After the emphatic injunctions respecting "the inexpensive,

"unostentatious, and strictly private manner" of his funeral, which were carried out to the very letter, he thus continues: "I direct that my name be inscribed "in plain English letters on my tomb. . . . . "I conjure my friends on no account to make me the "subject of any monument, memorial, or testimonial "whatever. I rest my claims to the remembrance of "my country upon my published works, and to the "remembrance of my friends upon their experience of "me in addition thereto. I commit my soul to the "mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus "Christ; and I exhort my dear children humbly to "try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New "Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in "any man's narrow construction of its letter here or "there."

In that simple but sufficient faith he lived and died; in that faith he bids you live and die. If any of you have learnt from his works the value, the eternal value of generosity, purity, kindness, unselfishness, and have learnt to show these in your own hearts and lives, these are the best monuments, memorials, and testimonials of the friend whom you loved, and who loved, with a rare and touching love, his friends, his country, and his fellowmen:—monuments which he would not refuse, and which the humblest, the poorest, the youngest have it in their power to raise to his memory.

LONDON: PRINTED BY
SPOTTISWOODE AND CO., NEW-STREET SQUARE
AND PARLIAMENT STREET

00111086

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 19 September, 2016